



ARMENIA ON THE TIGRIS:  
THE VILAYET OF DIARBEKIR AND  
THE SANJAK OF URFA

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The *vilayet* or province of Diarbekir (Armenian: Tigranakert/Dikranagerd) was a curious administrative entity. Lying partly in the extreme southern reaches of the Armenian Plateau, the province extended into northern Mesopotamia, a lowland area not usually regarded in the Ottoman period as a part of Armenia. Nevertheless, the province included the unquestionably Armenian town and district of Palu, and a substantial number of Armenians inhabited other cities and towns in the province. To the southwest of the vilayet was the *sanjak* (county) of Urfa, a separate entity that had previously been included in the adjacent vilayet of Aleppo (Haleb/Halab). It, too, had considerable Armenian significance.<sup>1</sup>

The boundaries of the province of Diarbekir were curiously artificial. The district of Palu, with its numerous Armenian villages, lay north of the Taurus Mountains, while most of the

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<sup>1</sup> For Diarbekir, see Ghukas Inchichian, *Storagrutiun hin Hayastaniayts* [Geography of Ancient Armenia] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1822), pp. 74-84; Xavier Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse. . . . 1846, 1847 et 1848*, 4 vols. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1854-1860); V. Chapot, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1908); Albert Gabriel, *Les monuments turcs d'Anatolie*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1931-1934); Max van Berchem and Josef Strzygowski, *Amida* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1910); Mikayel Hovhannesian, *Hayastani berdere* [The Fortresses of Armenia] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1970), pp. 134-54; Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114-240 CE* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). See also the relevant articles in the *Islam Antsikopedesi*, especially for the various Turkish dynasties once ruling in the Diarbekir area.

province extended to the south of the range. The Armenian Plateau visibly receded into the Mesopotamian plains as one journeyed south toward the city of Diarbekir. The Greeks called this lowland region Mesopotamia, "the land between the rivers,"<sup>2</sup> while the Arabs called it al-Jazire, "the island," because it was almost surrounded by its two major rivers, the Tigris on the north and east, and the Euphrates on the west.<sup>3</sup>

The Diarbekir plain is low-lying and receives little rain, but it is well watered by its rivers, including the Tigris and Western Khabur and their many tributaries. Though the winters are often harsh, they are short; the summers are long and hot and can be uncomfortable in the crowded cities, with fevers and outbreaks of typhus and serious boils not uncommon. The region is also home to a particularly venomous species of scorpions.<sup>4</sup>

There are two major cities in northern Mesopotamia, Diarbekir<sup>5</sup> and Urfa (now Sanliurfa).<sup>6</sup> Mardin was also an important center, and in ancient times the present village of Nusaybin was famous as the great caravan city and Christian center of Nisibis.<sup>7</sup> Farkin (Mayyafaraqin), now Silvan, early

<sup>2</sup> Claudii Ptolemaei (Claudius Ptolemy), *Geographia*, ed. C.F.A. Nobbe (Leipzig: Tauschnitz, 1843-1845; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), Bk V, ch. 18. Different editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* use different divisions and subdivisions. Nobbe's edition, despite its age and with all its defects, is complete.

<sup>3</sup> For al-Jazire, see Guy Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), ch. 4, and *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 86-114.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910), vol. 8, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> For Diarbekir, see Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1891), pp. 450-64; *Haykakan Sovetakan hanragitaran* [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 3 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1977), pp. 375-77, s.v. "Diarbekir."

<sup>6</sup> For Urfa/Edessa, see Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 248-63; Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, pp. 103-04; Judah B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Ross, *Roman Edessa*; Joseph Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1919; rev. ed., M. Canard: Lisbon: Bertrand, 1980), pp. 99, 288; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960-2003), vol. 8, pp. 589-93; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 8, pp. 930-33, s.v. "Edessa"; *Haykakan Sovetakan hanragitaran*, vol. 12 (1986), pp. 293-94, s.v. "Urfa."

<sup>7</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 499-502, 508-11.

celebrated for its relics of martyrs, was in the Byzantine period known as Martyropolis and was an important site of Christian pilgrimage.<sup>8</sup>

Historically, the province of Diarbekir lacked geographical, cultural, or historical cohesion. In ancient and early medieval times, the northern part, lying in the Taurus Mountains upon the Armenian Plateau, contained the Armenian principality of Balahovit (Greek: Balabitene),<sup>9</sup> south of which lay Andzit-Angeghtun (Greek: Ingilene-Anzitene),<sup>10</sup> which formed a second principality. Farther south was a third principality, Mets (Greater) Tsopk (Greek: Sophanene/Sophene), which extended to beyond the Tigris River.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 471-72.

<sup>9</sup> For Balahovit/Balabitene, see Heinrich Hübschmann, *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen* (Strassburg: Indogermanische Forschungen, 1904; repr. Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1969), p. 294; Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp. 131, 137, 138nn240-41, 212; Stepan T. Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoyts"-i* [Armenia According to the "Ashkharhatsoyts"] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1963), p. 43; N[igoghayos] Adontz, *Armenia v epokhu Iustiniana* (St. Petersburg: Faculty of Oriental Languages, 1908), trans. and comm. Nina G. Garsoïan, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970), see index, "Balahovit" and "Balabitene"; Thomas A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, vol. 3 (London: Pindar, 1989), pp. 140-41; Robert H. Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak, Ašxarhačoyč: The Long and Short Recensions* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), p. 155n34.

<sup>10</sup> For Andzit/Anzitene or Handzit, see Hübschmann, *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen*, p. 300; Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoyts"-i*, p. 86; Toumanoff, *Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 131, 137, 138n240, 167, 172, 234; Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, see index "Anzitene" and "Andzit"; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 139-40; Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 156n36. The *Ashkharhatsoyts* does not mention Angeghtun, probably subsuming it into Andzit. For Angeghtun/Ingilene, see Hübschmann, *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen*, pp. 303-04; Toumanoff, *Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 131, 137, 138n240-41, 212; Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoyts"-i*, p. 35, s.v. "Angegh-tun"; Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, see index "Ingilene"; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 139-40; Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 155n34.

<sup>11</sup> For Greater Tsopk/Sophanene, see Hübschmann, *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen*, pp. 296-300; Toumanoff, *Christian Caucasian History*, pp. 137-39, 167, 168, 170, 174, 237n306; Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, *passim*; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, p. 358. The *Ashkharhatsoyts* does not mention this district (nor does Eremyan in his study of the text), which probably no longer existed at the time it was written, as it had been subsumed into the later Byzantine jurisdiction of Fourth

South of Mets Tsopk and occupying most of the territory of the northern Mesopotamian plain was the kingdom of Osrhoene. The most northerly of Arab lands, Osrhoene was called in Armenian Mijagetk Asorots (Syrian Mesopotamia).<sup>12</sup> East of Osrhoene the kingdom of Adiabene had its capital at Arbela (now Erbil) located on the territory of the ancient Assyrian heartland. Known as Hedayab to the natives, Adiabene was always called by the historic name of Asorestan (Assyria) by the Armenians. Between Osrhoene and Adiabene was the province called Mygdonia by the Greeks and centered at the city of Nisibis. Known to the Armenians as Arvastan, that is Arabistan, it passed from Armenian rule to that of Adiabene in around 37 A.D.<sup>13</sup>

### *Early History*

The earliest historical knowledge of the lowland area dates from the late Assyrian period, circa 800-600 B.C., when it was a war zone between the rival empires. Many localities are mentioned in this period, some of which can be identified, among them Amedi or Amidi, which is certainly Amida, now Diarbekir. In the sixth century B.C., the plain was conquered by the Persians and became part of the Achaemenian Empire. Alexander the Great passed through northern Mesopotamia on his conquest of the Persian Empire in the 330s B.C., and after his death in 323 the region became a part of the empire of one of his successors, Seleucus Nicator.<sup>14</sup> The capital of the empire

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Armenia. See also Hewsen, *Geography of Ananias of Širak*, p. 154. Jones cites eight localities in the combined jurisdictions of [Armenian] Mesopotamia and Fourth Armenia: Amida, Martyropolis, Dara, Cephas, Turabdium, Dadima, Arsamosata, and Citharizon.

<sup>12</sup> For the kingdom of Osrhoene, see Segal, *Edessa*; Ashot G. Abrahamyan, *Anania Shirakatsu matenagrutyune* [The Works of Ananias of Shirak] (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1944); repr. with intro. by Robert Hewsen (Delmar, NY: Caravan Press, 1994), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> "Arvastan, or kochi Asorestan." See Abrahamyan, *Anania Shirakatsu matenagrutyune*, p. 352.

<sup>14</sup> Assyrian: Amedi or Amidi. See *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1912-<2004>), vol. 2, col. 1238.

was first the new city of Seleucia near Babylon, and then, as control over southern Mesopotamia was lost, it was shifted to Antioch, near the Mediterranean Sea.

The region of Amida was anything but a backwater in ancient times. Major trade routes crossed the northern Mesopotamian plains, and great caravan cities arose along them, all closely connected by commercial ties: Samosata (Armenian: Shamshat) on the Upper Euphrates, then Edessa (Etesiya) to the east, followed by Harran (Kharan), Mardin (Marde; Mardeberd), Dara, and Nisibis (Mtsbin), ending finally at Mosul (Mtsugh) on the Tigris, a city that had arisen in place of the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh, which was destroyed in 612 B.C. Further north, a second route passed in the reverse direction from Bezabde (al-Jazira or Jezire, now Cizre) through Arzan, Martyropolis (Npret/Nprkert; Martirosats Kaghak, now Silvan) to Amida.

Along these roads traversed a steady stream of merchants, ambassadors, missionaries, and armies. All of these cities are cited by Armenian authors. Samosata was a great caravan center and the capital of the kingdom of Commagene, which had an Armenian dynasty—a branch of the Orontid or Ervanduni house. Following its annexation by Rome in 213 A.D., this region became known in the Byzantine period as the province of Euphratensis.<sup>15</sup> Harran, where Abraham is said to have received his covenant from God, was until well into the Middle Ages a center of worship of the moon-god Sin.<sup>16</sup> Marde was an important stronghold overlooked by a large castle, while Dara was a major Byzantine fortress that was restored by the emperor Justinian, and Nisibis became a noted center of Nestorian Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Toumanoff, *Christian Caucasian History*, p. 278. For Euphratensis, see Jones, *Cities*, p. 552.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Armenian *lusin*, from *louys-sini* (light of Sin?), that is, "of the moon."

<sup>17</sup> For Marde, see Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 201-18, and Procopius, *Buildings* (Loeb Classical Library), II.i.11-27; III.i.3; III.v.10-11; for Dara, see Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 219-23.

### *The Ancient City of Amida*

The city of Amida (Armenian: Ameda) lay on the western (right) bank of the Tigris River at an altitude of 1,920 feet.<sup>18</sup> The river flanks the city on the east as it descends from the Armenian Plateau just before its sharp bend eastward. Although the site has been inhabited since the first millennium B.C. and its citadel dates back to the fourth century B.C., Amida was such an insignificant place for so long that it was scarcely noted by early Greek and Roman writers. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer of the second century A.D., calls it "Ammaia,"<sup>19</sup> but a third-century Roman road map, the so-called Peutinger Table, uses the name "Amida."<sup>20</sup> As a result of the site's early obscurity, Armenian writers have often identified Amida with the ancient city of Tigranakert (Dikranagerd), founded by the Armenian king, Tigran the Great (95-56/55 B.C.) who constructed it as the splendid capital of his short-lived empire. It is not certain where Tigranakert was located. There have been reasons given for placing it at Silvan, at Sairt (Sghert; Siirt), at Tell-Armen, or at Arzan—all in upper Mesopotamia.<sup>21</sup> The least likely candidate (unfortunately for *Dikranagerdtsi* Armenians) is Diarbekir. Wherever Tigranakert may have been located, it certainly was not on the Tigris, while neither Silvan, nor Tell-Armen, nor Seert answers the description of the local terrain given by Roman historians who wrote of its siege and

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<sup>18</sup> See Segal, *Edessa*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Ptolemy, ed. Nobbe, V.xviii.10. The spelling *Ammaia* is probably a copyist's error for *Amaeda*.

<sup>20</sup> *Tabula Peutingeriana* [Peutinger Table] (cviii-a) for which see Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, pp. 131\*-35\*, for the text, and Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 68-70, for the road map. This is a medieval copy (probably late-fifteenth century) of a third-century Roman road map showing, schematically, the main trade routes of the Roman world. The map locates Amida at a point 27 Roman miles south of the crossing of the Tigris (*Ad Tygrem*) by the Roman road.

<sup>21</sup> For a review of the supporters of various sites proposed for the location of Tigranakert, see M.-L. Chaumont, "Tigranocerte: données du problème et état des recherches," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 16 (1982): 89-110. See also Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 361-64, s.v. "Tigranocerta."

capture by General Lucullus in 69 B.C.<sup>22</sup> The most logical site of Tigranakert advanced so far is Arzan, which was in the Bitlis region, beyond the boundary of the Diarbekir vilayet.<sup>23</sup>

Curiously, the exact status of Amida before the fourth century A.D. is unknown. As a frontier town, it may have lain within the kingdom of Greater Armenia, that is, in the principality of Mets Tsopk or served as an outpost of the Roman Empire. Its geographical location on the right bank of the Tigris River suggests the latter, but, on the other hand, if Ptolemy's "Ammaia" is Amida, he places it in non-Roman Mesopotamia. It is clear that Amida became a Roman colony as early as 213 A.D. and had a bishop since 325.<sup>24</sup> Bishop Mara of Amida signed the acts of the second ecumenical council held at Constantinople in 381, but forty years later the see of Amida was in the hands of a rival Nestorian bishop, Acacius, who attended the Nestorian council of 420.<sup>25</sup> The city became important only in 349 when it was fortified by Emperor Constantius II (337-61), erecting its black basalt walls to withstand Persian invasions.<sup>26</sup> The city walls, once buttressed by some 72 towers (most of which still remain), are 3.3 miles (5.5 kilometers) in length, the longest in the Middle East. Repaired by Emperor Valens (364-78) and completed by Emperor Anastasius (491-518), the ramparts were later rebuilt in the Arab and Ottoman periods.

With the Roman/Byzantine loss of Nisibis to the Persians in 363, the local population was transferred to Amida, after which the city gained in significance as a defensive position.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For the siege of Tigranakert by Lucullus, see Plutarch, "Lucullus," in *Lives* (Loeb Classical Library), XXV.iii-XXIX.iv; Eutropius, X.16.1; Strabo, 11.xiv.15. Among modern authors, see Hakob Manandian [Mananyan], trans. Hiranth Thorossian, *Tigrane II et Rome* (Lisbon: Imp. Nacional, 1963), chs. 10-12; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 361-64.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 361-64.

<sup>24</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, p. 14; Heinrich Gelzer, *Patrum Nicaenorum nomina* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, col. 1238.

<sup>26</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* (Loeb Classical Library), XVIII.ix.1, XXV.vii.1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, XXV.ix.5. In the fourth century, Amida was the seat of the Fifth Legion *Parthica* (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XVIII.ix.3). In its suburbs was held

To guard against the Persian threat, many forts and fortresses were constructed or reconstructed throughout northern Mesopotamia, such as at Saphchae, Illyrisum, and Pheisos.<sup>28</sup> Despite the efforts of Constantius II and later emperors, however, Amida changed hands frequently, falling to the Persians after a long siege in 359 and again in 502 at which time 80,000 of its inhabitants were reportedly slain.<sup>29</sup> Wars were not the only afflictions. Amida suffered the ravages of plague in 359 and 559 and was struck by major earthquakes in 679 and 718.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Kingdom of Osrhoene and the Ancient City of Edessa (Urfa)*

In the second century B.C., the Seleucid Empire began to break apart and from it emerged a number of more-or-less Hellenized petty states, among them in about 130 B.C. the kingdom of Osrhoene.<sup>31</sup> Seleucid Syria, shorn of its empire, survived as a

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an annual fair (XVIII.viii.13).

<sup>28</sup> Procopius, *Buildings*, III.iii.1-4. For other forts and fortresses, see *Georgii Cyprii Descriptio Orbis Romani* [George of Cyprus, Description of the Roman World], ed. Heinrich Gelzer (Leipzig: Teubner, 1890); Hewsen, *Atlas*, maps 48, 65, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, ch. XIX *passim*; Segal, *Edessa*, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> For the plague of 359, see Ammianus Marcellinus, XIX.iv.1; for that of 559, see *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, col. 1240.

<sup>31</sup> The kingdom of Osrhoene took its name from the Aramaic form for its capital, Orhai (Greek: Orrhoe, Edessa or Antiochia-on-the-Callirhoe (River); Arabic: ar-Ruha; Turkish: Urfa). The Greek termination *-ene* was the indication of a province in the Seleucid Empire and long survived the empire in Greek and Latin usage for various countries and provinces in the East (for example, Adiabene, Commagene, Arzanene) and for districts and principalities (for example, Balabitenne, Asthianene). Osrhoene would be the province surrounding its center, the city of Orrhoe from Orhai (?), the Syriac name for Edessa (Segal, *Edessa*, p. 9).

The sixty-nine towns and villages cited by Ptolemy in his "Mesopotamia" (ed. Nobbe, V.18.10) might be used to indicate the limits of the kingdom of Osrhoene at its greatest extent, although unfortunately most of them are now unidentifiable: Porsica, Aniana, Baisampse, Sarnuca, Bersiba, Maubae, Nicephorion, Maguda, Chabora, Thelda, Apphadana, Banace, Zitha, Bethauna (Batna/Suruj?), Resciphia, Agamana, Eudrapa, Addaea, Pacoria, Tiridata, Naarda, Sipphara, Seleucia; on the Tigris River: Dorbeta, Sapphe, Deba, Singara (Sinjar), Betoun, Lambana, BIRTHA, Carthara, Manchane, Scaphe, and Apamea; in the interior (that is, between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers): Bithias, Edessa, Ombraca, Ammaea (Amida?),

kingdom until annexed by Tigran the Great in 84 B.C. and then by the Romans in 63 B.C. Thereafter, Osrhoene was continuously fought over by the Roman Empire and the two successive Iranian empires that opposed it, that of the Parthians until 220s A.D. and then the Sasanian (Sasanid) Persians until the 630s. Osrhoene, a buffer state between Rome and Iran, was annexed by the Romans in about 242 as a direct result of the mounting threat posed by Persia.<sup>32</sup>

The kingdom of Osrhoene was also important in Armenian history. Its dynasty, that of the Abgarids, was probably connected by marriage with the Arshakuni (Arsacid) ruling house of Armenia. When a legend arose that one of its several kings named Abgar had corresponded with Christ and had received His sacred image on a piece of cloth, the Armenians borrowed the story, making Abgar a king of Armenia and connecting the earliest evangelization of Armenia with Saint Addai (Thaddeus), who was believed to have brought the sacred image of Christ to Abgar. Edessa was an eminent cultural center and the earliest seat of Syriac-speaking Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

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Suma, Rhisina (Ras al-Ain), Olibera, Sarrara, Sacane, Arxama, Gizama, Sinna, Mambuta (Mambij?), Nisibis (Nusaybin), Bithiga, Baxala, Auladis, Ballatha, Carrae (Harran), Tirittha, Thengubis, Orthaga, Eleia, Zama, Sinna, Gorbatha, Dabausa, Bariana, Acraba, Apphadana, Rhesaena (a duplicate of Rhisina, that is, Ras-al-Ain), Peliala, Aluanis, Bimatra, Daremma.

For Osrhoene (Byzantine: *Euphratensis*), see A.H.M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), ch. 9 and p. 530, where twenty localities in the country are listed: Edessa, Constantia, Theodosiopolis (that is, Rhesaina, now Ras-al-Ain), Carrhae (Harran), Batnae (Suruj), Nea Valentia, Callinicum, Leontopolis (identical with Callinicum), Birtha, Monithilla, Therimachon, Moniauga, Macarta, Marcopolis, Anastasia (that is, Anastasiopolis or Dara), Hemerium, Circesium, Marathas, Dausara, and Macedonopolis.

<sup>32</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> For the Abgar legend in its classic form, see Eusebius of Caesaria, *The Ecclesiastical History* (Loeb Classical Library), 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), I.xiii.2-22. For the Armenian elaborations, see Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], Robert W. Thomson, trans. and comm., *Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Bk II.26-33. See also Segal, *Edessa*, pp. 62-82.



The religious history of the Diarbekir region reflects both its location on a network of trade routes and the diversity of its people. While the kings of Adiabene adopted Judaism as their faith,<sup>34</sup> those of Osrhoene, with their capital at Edessa, became Christians. Edessa developed into an early Christian center. Thirty of its many churches are known by name, and it was probably the first city anywhere to have a predominantly Christian population. Referred to by Syriac writers as the "Blessed City," Edessa was famed for its monasteries and Christian schools, its scriptoria, theologians, translators, and renowned Christian writers such as Bardaisan (Bardesanes), whose works reputedly included a history of Armenia, and the theologian Saint Ephraim the Syrian (circa 306-73). Works of both authors were translated into Armenian early on. Other authors who either were born or who lived and worked in Edessa include the theologian Aphrahat (died about 345), the translator Bishop Rabbula (died 346), the chronicler Joshua the Stylite (composed in 507), the author of the anonymous *Chronicle of Edessa* (about 540), the chronicler Dionysios of Tell-Mahre (died 845), and the historian Michael the Syrian (died 1136).

After the Byzantine loss of Nisibis to the Persians in 363, Edessa became the most important Byzantine defensive position west of the Euphrates River. The city was (and still is) noted for its two holy pools in which were kept a variety of carp held to be sacred. Here, too, a holy cloth known as the *Mandylion* was preserved until the time of the Crusaders. The revered object was said to contain the miraculously-imposed image of Christ sent to the Abgarid king of Edessa in the first century.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For Adiabene, see *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901-1906), vol. 1, pp. 191-92; *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), vol. 2, cols. 267-68; for the conversion to Judaism in Adiabene, see col. 267. See also *Haykakan Sovetakan hanragitaran*, vol. 1 (1974), pp. 73-74 (with map).

<sup>35</sup> For "the Blessed City," see Segal, *Edessa*; for Bardesanes, pp. 34-37, and for St. Ephraim, pp. 88-90, 167. For the later authors, see *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, p. 676, s.v. "Edessa."

*The Ancient City of Nisibis and Tur Abdin*

Nisibis, the capital of Arvastan/Mygdonia, a province of Adiabene from 37 A.D., was also a center of early Christian learning especially for those who adhered to the doctrines of the Nestorian sect. It is often referred to by Armenian writers, and the first known bishop of the city, Saint James of Nisibis (308/09-38), was renowned for his holiness. According to an Armenian tradition, he was a first cousin of the evangelizer of Armenia, Saint Gregory the Illuminator,<sup>36</sup> and the first man to climb the mountain upon which Noah's Ark was said to have come to rest.<sup>37</sup> Much esteemed in Armenia in his own lifetime as Surb Hakob Mtsbna, his feast day is still celebrated with special reverence by the Armenian Apostolic Church. James of Nisibis attended the Council of Nicaea in 325, along with Simeon, first bishop of Amida, and Aristakes, son of Gregory the Illuminator, who represented his father at this, the first ecumenical council.<sup>38</sup>

At the third ecumenical council, at Ephesus in 431, the doctrines of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (428-31), were condemned, and he was forced out of office. Nestorius taught that Christ was a man in whom God dwelled rather than

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<sup>36</sup> See *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, p. 676, for Emperor Zeno's closing of the theological school of Edessa for its Nestorian tendencies in 489 and its subsequent reopening in Nisibis. See also "Nisibis," *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, p. 1488. Nisibis, because of its Armenian name Mtsbin, was sometimes confused with the Armenian town of Mtsum (for example, by Movses Khorenatsi), which was probably located in the plain of Taron. See Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians*, p. 55n105.

<sup>37</sup> Levon Avdoyan, *Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean: The History of Taron [Patmut' iwn Taronoy]: Historical Investigation, Critical Translation, and Historical and Textual Commentaries* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> Pavstos Buzandatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of Armenia] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1933), trans. Nina G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut' iwnk')* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), III.10. The *Buzandaran* makes it clear that Mount Sararad (now Cudi Dag in Kurdistan) is meant as the mountain of the Ark, but later Armenian writers redirected the story to the northeast, identifying the mountain in question with Mount Masis (Ararat) in central Armenia. According to tradition, St. James of Nisibis was buried at Edessa. See Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 173; Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, II.89.

being himself divine and who thus rejected the title "Mother of God" under which the Virgin Mary was already being adored in the Christian world. Safely outside of Roman jurisdiction, the Nestorians flourished at Nisibis under their own patriarch. Railed against by the Armenian Church, which feared the penetration of Nestorius's doctrines into its jurisdiction, Nestorianism became the faith of many eastern Syrians and also of the Christian Church in Persia from where it spread across Central Asia all the way into China.<sup>39</sup> An extremely large and aggressive branch of Christianity, the Nestorian Church flourished for centuries until its ecclesiastical organization was wrecked during the thirteenth-century Mongol invasions from which it never recovered. Called Aisori or Asori (Assyrian), the survivors of the faith are concentrated in northern Iraq and in the United States. There are three Asori villages in the Armenian republic.

Besieged unsuccessfully by the Persians in 338, 346, and 350, Nisibis was finally ceded to them by Emperor Jovian in 363 after a disastrous Roman campaign. Following its occupation by the Persians, however, Nisibis retained its considerable economic importance, being designated in the sixth century as one of only three legal transfer points for goods traded between the Byzantine and Persian empires.<sup>40</sup>

Lying between Nisibis and the town of Hisn Kayfa (Hasankeyf; Hasanköy) but still within the confines of the vilayet of Diarbekir was Tur Abdin, a rolling region which since the fifth century had become a center of Syrian Orthodox or Jacobite Christianity. Of its many monasteries, some of them being the recipients of imperial Byzantine patronage, that of Mar (Lord) Gabriel was the most important and for long (613-1088) was the seat of the Syrian Orthodox bishop of the Tur Abdin region. It remains in existence to this day and is again the seat

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<sup>39</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, pp. 1459-60.

<sup>40</sup> *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. Paul Krüger, IV.lxii.4. For Nisibis (Assyrian: *Nasabina*; Syrian: *Nsiwin*; Persian: *Nishwin*; Greek: *Nisibis* or *Antioch of Mygdonia*), see Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Nisibe métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours*, *Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium*, 388; Subsidia 54 (Louvain: Peeters, 1977). For the sieges, see Segal, *Edessa*, p. 111.

of a local bishop. Tur Abdin contained many other monasteries, including those of Mar Yohannon, Mar Ibrahim, Mar Augen, Mar Dimet, Mar Abay, Mar Samuel, and that of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, but none of these belonged to the Armenian Church.<sup>41</sup>

### *Medieval Amid*

The fourth ecumenical council (Chalcedon, 451 A.D.) condemned the Monophysite doctrines of the Constantinople monk Eutyches (died between 451 and 454), who denied the dual nature of Christ and asserted in effect that Christ was God in human form but was never an actual human being. These teachings, however, died no more than did those of Nestorius, and both the Church of Egypt and the Church of Ethiopia as well as many Christian leaders in western Syria adopted positions that could be considered Monophysitic. Although the Armenian Church condemned the Eutychian heresy, it was regarded as being in the Monophysite camp by virtue of the fact that it repudiated the Council of Chalcedon's Duophysite formula.<sup>42</sup> In time, Amida became a stronghold of Monophysite Christianity. Justinian tried to stamp out the heresy, but through the influence of his empress, Theodora, whose Monophysite leanings are well known, a Monophysite see was established at Antioch in 543 under a certain bishop named Jacob Baradaeus (circa 500-78). This communion, the so-called Jacobite Church of Syria, welcomed the Arabs as liberators from Byzantine oppression.<sup>43</sup> The Church still survives and

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<sup>41</sup> For the Tur Abdin district, see Louis Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie et les pays adjacents* (Paris: Geunther, 1962), pp. 29-35, 62-63; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 213-32, 240-58.

<sup>42</sup> For Eutyches, see *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, p. 759; for monophysitism, pp. 1398-99. For a variety of reasons, the Armenian Church in modern times has rejected the label of monophysitism although its Monophysite position is very clear in medieval Armenian texts. All this has now been attributed to "misunderstandings," and the orthodoxy of the Armenian Church was ratified, at least *de facto*, by the attendance of Pope John Paul II at the consecration of the new cathedral of Erevan in 2001.

<sup>43</sup> *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, col. 1240.

remains in communion with that of the Armenian and other Monophysite churches.

Under Byzantine rule, Amida became the seat of a metropolitan archbishop, with suffragan (subordinate) bishops at Ingila (Anggh) and Martyropolis.<sup>44</sup> The latter, on the road between Lake Van and Amida, was originally a Syrian village called Maipharacte but now became an important city.<sup>45</sup> Originally known to the Armenians as Npret or Nprkert, it came to be called Martyropolis or Martirosats Kaghak from the large collection of relics of the martyrs that had been accumulated there.<sup>46</sup>

### *Al-Jazire*

Amida was under Byzantine rule when the Arabs occupied the city in 639, and it soon reversed its role to become a buttress against, rather than for, the Byzantine Empire. While all Mesopotamia was known to the Arabs as al-Jazire (Djazire), the northern part became divided into two provinces, the Diyar Rabia "abode of [the tribe of] Rabia" in the east with its center at Mosul (al-Mawsil), and the Diyar Bakr "abode of [the tribe of] Bakr" in the west around Amid (Amida). To the southwest lay yet a third division, the Diyar Mudar with its center at Rakka (ar-Rakka).<sup>47</sup>

Under the Arab Caliphate of the Umayyad dynasty, Nisibis was the first capital of the Jazire, with deputy governors at Amid and Dara. The city of Amid served as the capital of the

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<sup>44</sup> The metropolitan was the archbishop of a provincial capital in the Byzantine Empire. Each city of any size within the province had its own bishop who served under the jurisdiction of his metropolitan. Archbishops existed in the Greek Church but they were simply higher bishops and not necessarily metropolitans.

<sup>45</sup> For Maipharacte/Martyropolis, which flourished especially in the tenth to twelfth centuries, see Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 287ff.; Ptolemy, ed. Nobbe, V.xiii.21.

<sup>46</sup> Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoyts"-i*, p. 73; Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, chs. 6-7, and for the Upper Euphrates, ch. 8; for ar-Ruha, see pp. 103-04, 125; for Amid, pp. 108-11. See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 347-48, vol. 8, pp. 589-93.

Diyar Bakr region, with Mayyafariqin (as the Arabs called Martyropolis), Hisn Kayfa, and Arzan as its principal towns.<sup>48</sup> The ancient watering place of Abarne or Vagharshakupolis survived as the fortress of Hisn al-Hamma (Armenian: Chermug, Chermuk, or Jermuk; Turkish: Chermik or Cermik).<sup>49</sup>

In the first decades of the Umayyad Caliphate, which was characterized by great prosperity, there was little persecution of Christians, who then constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. In the eighth century, however, under the new dynasty of the Abbasids, taxes were increased and the population was steadily ruined. Persecution of Christians intensified, and churches erected after the Arab conquest were torn down.<sup>50</sup> As the Arabs weakened in the ninth century, political disintegration set in. Mayyafariqin became the capital first of the Hamdanid state and then of the Kurdish Marwanids.<sup>51</sup> An increase in the number of Armenians in this region in the tenth century can be surmised by the fact that ar-Ruha/Edessa was one of the first cities outside of Armenia to which an Armenian bishop was appointed.<sup>52</sup>

As the Abbasids declined, Amid briefly became an independent Arab statelet (870-83) before being retaken by the Byzantines in 958.<sup>53</sup> In the eleventh century, the city fell to the

<sup>48</sup> Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, chs. 6-7; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, p. 344.

<sup>49</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XVIII.9.2; Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoys"-i*, p. 31. Abarne lay in a district called *Gaumatena*, obviously an otherwise unknown division of Mets Tsopk/Sophanene. The Armenian form of the name was possibly something like *Gaumat* (cf. Gaurek/Gaurene, a district in Andzit/Anzitene). See Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 343.

<sup>50</sup> For the harsh taxation and general impoverishment in this period, and the destruction of churches, see Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 383-84.

<sup>51</sup> Marius Canard, *Histoire du dynastie des H'andaniides de Jazîra et de la Syrie* (Alger: Impr. "La Typo-Litho" et J. Carbonel réunies, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 37ff. and 572ff. For the Marwanids, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 6, pp. 626-27.

<sup>52</sup> Khachik I Arsharuni (973-92) was the first Catholicos to appoint bishops to Greek sees to prevent the Greek Orthodox from absorbing Armenians within the Byzantine territories. He appointed bishops to Antioch in Syria and Tarsus in Cilicia as well. See Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*, 2d ed. (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1955), pp. 38-39. Amid had an Armenian bishop from the eighth century. See *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, col. 1246.

<sup>53</sup> Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 344.

Seljuk Turks.<sup>54</sup> Behind the Seljuk invaders came the Turkic tribes known as the Turkmen or Turkomans, one of whose chieftains set up a dynasty, the Inalids, at Amid. The most important of these early Turkmen formations was that of the Artukids, who ruled four statelets centered at Mardin, Hisn Kayfa, Kharpert, and Mayyafarqin.<sup>55</sup> The Seljuks regained Amid in 1241, then occupied Mayyafariqin in 1259 and Mardin in 1261.<sup>56</sup> As the Seljuk domination passed, many local chieftains emerged in Mesopotamia, some of them Armenians, and there were Armenian princes ruling in ar-Ruha/Edessa when the Crusaders arrived in 1097, as well as in Germanike (Marash), Malatia, Keysun, Karkar, and in Cilicia. The most celebrated of these were Philaretos Brachamios (Vahram) at Malatia and Kogh Vasil (Basil the Brigand) at Keysun.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, the Crusaders ousted the local rulers and set up a number of states of their own, among them the County of Edessa (in 1097), which they called Roha, Rohan, or Roais.<sup>58</sup>

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols appeared in the Middle East. Under Hulagu Khan (1256-65), the grandson of the great conqueror Genghis Khan (1206-27), they overran Persia and, sweeping all before them, took Amid and Edessa without a struggle. Shortly afterwards the Diyar Bakr region was placed under a Mongol governor established at Mosul.<sup>59</sup> As a result

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<sup>54</sup> Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire 1860-1908* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977 [1978]), p. 18. Amid was definitively taken by the Seljuk Turks under Alp Arslan's successor, Malik Shah, in 1085.

<sup>55</sup> For the Artukids, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 662-67 (with genealogical chart).

<sup>56</sup> Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 344.

<sup>57</sup> Hewsen, *Atlas*, p. 136 and map 117.

<sup>58</sup> For the Crusader period, see René Grousset, *Histoire des croisades* (Paris: Plon, 1948); Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 382ff.; Kenneth M. Setton, ed.-in-chief, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1, Marshal W. Baldwin, ed., *The First Hundred Years* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955). For Roha, see T.S.R. Boase, ed., *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 162. For Rohan/Roais, see Hewsen, *Atlas*, map 124.

<sup>59</sup> See *Fodor's Turkey* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, 1999), p. 649. The Mongols left an Artukid branch reigning at Mardin and the Ayyubids in control of Hisn Kayfa. Mosul submitted to the Mongols in 1244/45.

of these devastating invasions, there was at first a complete disruption of trade in Mesopotamia,<sup>60</sup> but as the area was integrated into the vast trade network created by the Mongol Empire, commercial traffic resumed on an even wider scale than before. Trade routes altered, and Amid and Edessa/Urfa prospered as Nisibis declined. During the Mongol period, the Kurds continued to fan out from their homeland in the Zagros Mountains.

After the end of the rule of the Mongol Ilkhans (Hulagu Khan and his successors) in 1335, northern Mesopotamia once again disintegrated politically as a succession of local rulers, Arab, Turkish, Turkmen, and Kurdish, struggled for control of the area.<sup>61</sup> Under these conditions, the countryside was ruined, trade was disrupted, and towns declined. Arzan was abandoned, Nisibis became a large village, and Amid and Mayyafariqin lost importance.<sup>62</sup>

By about 1350, the chieftains of the Turkmen confederation known as the Black Sheep (Kara-Koyunlu) came to dominate these petty rulers. The invasion of Leng Timur (Tamerlane) in 1394 disrupted the Black Sheep for a time, and after Timur's death the White Sheep (Ak-Koyunlu) confederation arose in their place.<sup>63</sup> Centered at Amid, the White Sheep forced the local rulers one by one to recognize their authority. The Black Sheep confederation regained its strength, however, and a deadly feud soon developed between the two Turkmen formations.

These wars ruined Armenia in the fifteenth century and disrupted northern Mesopotamia as well.<sup>64</sup> With the decline in

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<sup>60</sup> The Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258 and their plunder of Mosul (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 6, pp. 1261-62) did much to disrupt commerce for many years after their initial invasions.

<sup>61</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 6, p. 344.

<sup>62</sup> Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, p. 397.

<sup>63</sup> For the White Sheep Turkmen, see John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu, Clan, Confederation, Empire*, rev. and expanded (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), ch. 2.

<sup>64</sup> The ruin of Armenia during the Turkmen wars is amply demonstrated by the lamentations found in the colophons of Armenian manuscripts during this period. See Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

security, there came a corresponding decline in the Christian population in rural areas, while the Kurds, Turks, and other Muslim elements came to dominate the region. After the White Sheep confederation destroyed the Black Sheep in 1468 and then began itself to disintegrate, the Ottoman Turks advanced into the area. Defeating the Turkmen chieftain Ismail Safi (founder of the Safavid dynasty of Persia) at the Battle of Chaldiran in southeastern Armenia in 1512, the Ottomans occupied Amid or Kara-Amid (Black Amid, as they originally called it because of its grim dark walls) in about 1516. They then made the city the capital of the frontier province of Diarbekir.<sup>65</sup>

### *Ottoman Diarbekir/Diyarbakir*

Some time after the Ottoman conquest, the name of the province of Diarbekir came to be applied to the city as well, replacing the earlier name of Amida or Amid. Thereafter, with its walls rebuilt, Diarbekir became a bastion of Ottoman power against the Persians during a series of devastating wars that lasted from 1501 until 1639.<sup>66</sup> Lying near the Persian frontier, Amida remained a city of strategic importance as it had in the Arab, Seljuk, and Mongol periods. Its mighty triple walls, rebuilt and expanded by the Arabs in 910, were reconstructed as late as 1815.<sup>67</sup>

At first, the newly occupied region of Diarbekir was organized as a large Ottoman province that included almost all of the territories of the former Diyar Bakr, Diyar Rabia, and Diyar Mudar. Later, because of its importance, lying as it did along the frontier with Safavid Persia, it became the *pashalik* or military province of Diarbekir. In time, Urfa was separated from Diarbekir to become a sanjak or county of its own, and

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<sup>65</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, p. 344; Woods, *Aqqyunlu*, p. 166; Krikorian, *Armenians*, p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> For the Ottoman-Safavid wars (1534-36, 1548-49, 1553-55, 1578-1639), see Donald E. Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire from Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 119-20, maps 25, 31, 32.

<sup>67</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 344-45.

Bitlis was also separated to become a part of the vilayet of Van and eventually a separate vilayet entirely. The Ottomans at first exercised tight supervision over the local rulers along their eastern frontier. After 1600, however, they began to lose control, and this led to the emergence of Kurdish emirates. Even cities such as Diarbekir and Mardin passed under the rule of hereditary Kurdish emirs or governors, who were virtually independent. In 1826, the Ottoman government, now in mortal fear of the Russian advance south of the Caucasus range, began to suppress the various Kurdish emirs, begs, and derebeys (valley lords). Even though the last semi-independent Kurdish emirate was extinguished in 1847, Kurdish revolts continued until 1879.<sup>68</sup>

The vilayet of Diarbekir was organized in 1867 with four administrative divisions: the sanjaks of Diarbekir, Ergani, Mardin, and Malatia. In 1879, the sanjak of Malatia in the northwestern sector was detached in the making of the vilayet of Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Kharpert). The three remaining sanjaks of the older vilayet were subdivided into fourteen *kazas* (districts): the sanjak of Diarbekir with the kazas of Diarbekir, Severek (Severeg), Derik (Direk), Lije, Beshiri, Silvan (Slivan), and later Veran-Shehir; the sanjak of Ergani (Arghana-Maden) with Palu, Ergani, and Chermik; and the sanjak of Mardin with Mardin, Nusaybin, Jezire, Midiat, and Avine. These kazas were in turn subdivided into fifty-four *nahiyes* (cantons) containing some 3,200 villages.<sup>69</sup> The total area of the vilayet was about 16,200 square miles (42,000 square kilometers).

### *Economy and Population*

The economic picture in the vilayet of Diarbekir was typical of the situation almost everywhere in the Ottoman Empire: tremendous potential coupled with virtually no planning and little progress.<sup>70</sup> Agriculture was primitive, trade was hindered

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<sup>68</sup> Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 409-10.

<sup>69</sup> Krikorian, *Armenians*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> For a fuller description of the economy of the vilayet of Diarbekir, see Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 416-45, and Hewsen, *Atlas*, p. 200.

by unpaved roads, and industry was poorly developed. The provincial capital was known for its copper products and especially for its gold and silver filigree work. It was also a center for the production of woolen textiles and fine linen.<sup>71</sup> Essentially, however, the economy of Diarbekir was agrarian: the vilayet produced cereals, cotton, rice, silk, and tobacco, and the rich volcanic soil yielded excellent fruits and melons famed for their size.<sup>72</sup> The province was also given over to semi-nomadism involving the herding of cattle, sheep, and goats.<sup>73</sup> Except for a rich but poorly exploited copper mine at Arghana, the only minerals found were galena mineral oil and siliceous sand.<sup>74</sup>

With some exceptions, the Armenian population of the vilayet of Diarbekir was concentrated in the northern sector of the province, as the southern part lay on the Mesopotamian plains rather than upon the Armenian Plateau. The Armenians were largely merchants, traders, artisans, and craftsmen and hence were found mostly in the cities, especially in Diarbekir itself and in Mardin, which was a center of Armenian Catholicism.<sup>75</sup> There was a dense Armenian rural population in the kaza of Palu and a number of villages in the vicinity of Severek in the western sector of the vilayet. In the sanjaks of Diarbekir and Ergani, Armenians lived in some 130 towns and villages.<sup>76</sup>

According to Vital Cuinet, whose incomplete data was compiled in the 1880s, the population of the vilayet of Diarbekir was distributed as follows:<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Bernard Mc Donagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, 2d ed. (New York and London: A&C Black, 1995); *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, p. 345.

<sup>72</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, p. 416.

<sup>73</sup> The Kurds, whose numbers increased steadily in the region before and during the Ottoman period, were the primary herdsmen in the vilayet.

<sup>74</sup> Hewsen, *Atlas*, p. 200.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Naslian, *Les mémoires de Mgr. Jean Naslian, Evêque de Trébizonde, sur les événements politico-religieux en Proche-Orient de 1914 à 1918*, 2 vols. (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 315-32.

<sup>76</sup> Raymond Kévorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens de l'empire Ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1992), p. 392, map.

<sup>77</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, p. 412.

## Vital Cuinet (1880s)

Muslim	
Turk and Turkmen	310,644
Circassian	10,000
Syrian-Arab	8,000
Yezidi-Kizilbash	6,000
Gypsy	3,000
Jew	1,269
Christian	
Armenian	
Apostolic	57,890
Catholic	10,170
Protestant	11,069
Greek	
Orthodox	9,250
Catholic	190
Chaldean Catholic	16,420
Syrian Catholic	4,990
Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite)	22,554
Latin Catholic	16
TOTAL	471,462

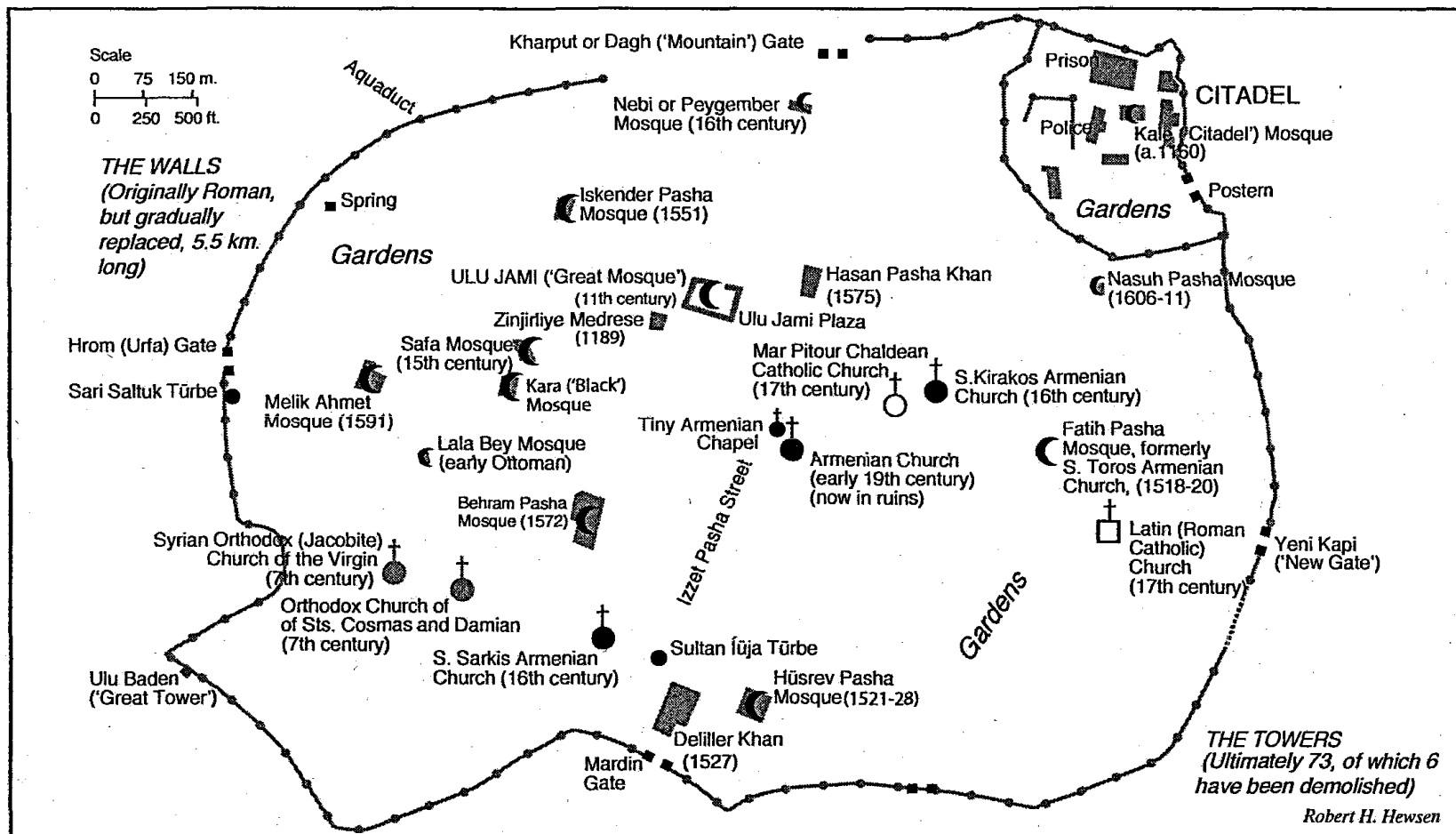
The figures for the Armenian population, obtained as they were from Ottoman sources, seem to be too low but, as Mesrob Krikorian has pointed out, Armenian statistics tend to be inflated.<sup>78</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the pseudonymous M.A., for example, showed 355,000 inhabitants in the vilayet of Diarbekir, of whom 120,000 were Armenian.<sup>79</sup> The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople counted 150,000 Armenians in the province in 1882 and 105,000 in 1912.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Krikorian, *Armenians*, p. 19.

<sup>79</sup> M.A., *Turkiayi hayern ev irents dratsiner* [The Armenians of Turkey and Their Neighbors] (Marseilles, 1890), statistical table.

<sup>80</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), p. 54. For a critique of this work and its methodology, see Levon Marashlian, *Politics and Demography: Armenians, Turks, and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1991).



The Vilayet of Diarbekir, 1914

Maghakia Ormanian gave the figure of 81,700 Armenians (78,000 Apostolic, 2,200 Protestants, and 1,500 Catholics) in the early twentieth century.<sup>81</sup> In the 1922 edition of the almanac *Amenun taretsoytse*, Teodik listed the pre-genocide Armenian population of Diarbekir as being 124,000.<sup>82</sup> The population of the vilayet also included some Gypsies, besides a few Europeans and Americans, mostly Catholic and Protestant missionaries.<sup>83</sup> In the lowlands there was a significant number of Yezidis, a sect of non-Islamic Kurds whose beliefs are still somewhat mysterious but which appear to represent the survival of aspects of the pre-Islamic religion of the ancient Persians. Despised by all and brutally persecuted from at least the seventeenth century, the Yezidis have scattered in all directions.<sup>84</sup>

### *Ecclesiastical Organization*

With its large Christian population, Diarbekir possessed a number of churches of different denominations. The most important of these were the Greek Church of Saint James and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian. The Ulu Jami or Great Mosque stood on the site of a church dedicated to Saint Theodore (Surb Toros). The Armenian Apostolic Church divided the vilayet of Diarbekir into four jurisdictions: the archdiocese of Diarbekir and Mardin under an archbishop in the provincial capital, and the dioceses of Arghana, Chunkush, and Palu. The sanjaks of Diarbekir and Mardin together possessed 42 parishes, 50 churches, and 45,000 adher-

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<sup>81</sup> Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, p. 206.

<sup>82</sup> Teodik, *Amenun taretsoytse* [Everyone's Almanac] (Constantinople: M. Hovakimian, 1922), p. 261.

<sup>83</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, p. 412, cites four French Franciscans and two Italian Capuchins in the entire vilayet of Diarbekir and ignores the presence of any Protestant missionaries. Nevertheless, it is clear from Julius Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions in the Near East* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), pp. 116ff., that there were American mission stations at Mardin from 1858 and at Diarbekir and Mosul as early as 1860.

<sup>84</sup> For the Yezidis, see John S. Guest, *Survival among Kurds: A History of the Yezidis* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1993). A few thousand Yezidis coexist peacefully with the Armenians in the contemporary Armenian republic.

ents. Arghana, under an abbot, had 9 parishes, 10 churches, and about 6,000 adherents; Chunkush, likewise under an abbot, had 3 parishes, 4 churches, and about 5,000 adherents. Palu, under a bishop, had 41 parishes, 40 churches, and about 22,000 adherents.<sup>85</sup>

Although its Armenian population was not so large, the vilayet of Diarbekir was endowed with many Armenian monasteries, including the following: Surb (Saint) Hakob of Hredan, Saltanema of Hredan (Hredani vank), Tovma of Gheterpel, Tovma of Terjeli, Tovma of Hazro, Astvatsatsin (Bardzrhayats) of Arghni (Arghana/Ergani), Tovma Arakial of Arghni, Astvatsatsin (Sirahayats) of Chunkush, Akili Anapat, Nshan of Akil, Daniel of Tirkavank, Srbaruts vank of Lije, Eghia of Heghin, Stepanos of Gedirvank, Eotn Manuk of Aharonk, Gevorg of Endzkar, Hakob of Saghtun, Arakelots of Harbakhn, Arakelots of Shamshan, Hakob of Shen, Stepanos of Purkh, Maruta of Spghank, Makabayetsvots of Akhta, Khach of Til, Astvatsatsin (Kaghtsrahayats) of Havav, Gevorg of Palu, Mesrop of Palu, Poghos of Nubshi, and Sargis of Mirvan.<sup>86</sup>

The Armenian Catholics in the province belonged either to the archdiocese of Mardin, founded in 1708, or to the archdiocese of Diarbekir (including Urfa), founded in 1727. Both sees came under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate at Bzommar in Lebanon, established in 1742. The largest Armenian Catholic centers were at Mardin and Tell-Armen. The archdiocese of Diarbekir was under an archbishop until 1890, when the see was reduced to a diocese under a bishop. The Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (Anarat Hghutiun) also operated in the diocese.<sup>87</sup>

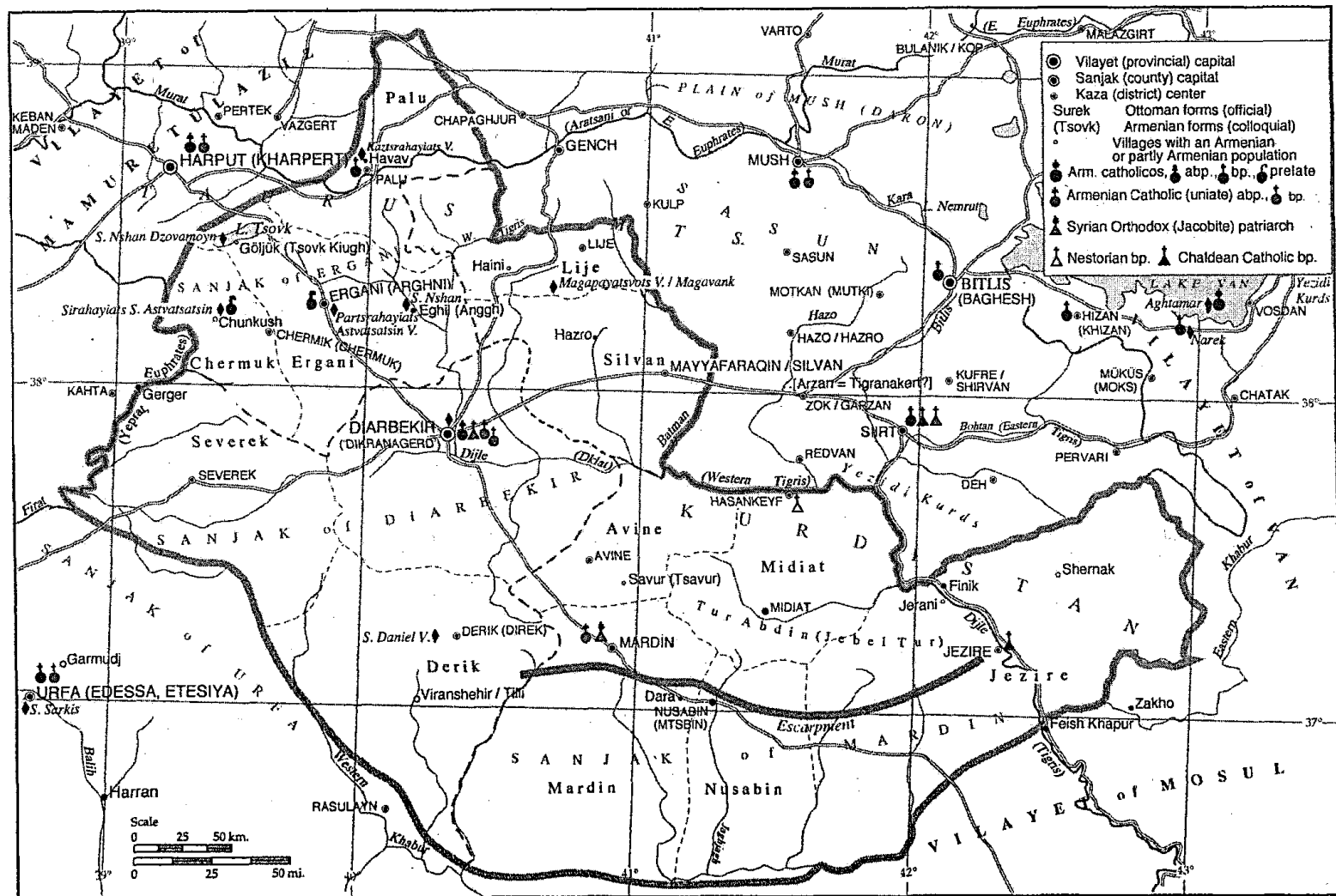
Among the mission stations in the city were those of the Franciscans, Franciscan Sisters, and Capuchins. An American

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<sup>85</sup> Ormanian, *Armenian Church*, p. 206.

<sup>86</sup> For the monasteries of the vilayet of Diarbekir, see Michel Thierry, *Répertoire des monastères arméniens* (Tournhout: Brepols, 1993), pp. 20-23, 25, where they are listed by kaza, and the earlier work of Hakob Oskian, *Sebastiayi, Kharberdi, Tiarpekiri ev Trapizoni nahangneru vankere* [The Monasteries of Sebastia, Kharpert, Diarbekir, and Trebizond Vilayets] (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1962).

<sup>87</sup> Hewsen, *Atlas*, p. 200.



The City of Diarbekir, 1914

mission station founded by Congregationalists from Boston in 1851 had its own hospital. In addition, a German hospital was maintained by the Lohmann Society.

### *City and Towns*

Diarbekir in 1914 was a city of about 38,000, and its population, composed of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Armenians, Chaldeans, Jacobites, and a few Greeks and non-Ottoman foreigners, was still about one-third Christian. Diarbekir had seven Armenian schools, including one Catholic and one Protestant. The city was surrounded by gardens, orchards, and villages, twenty-four of them inhabited by Armenians.<sup>88</sup>

Located on a flat basalt plain, Diarbekir had no suburbs beyond the walls, and its houses, though quite crowded together, did not fill the vast compass of the walls. In one corner of the city stood the ruined citadel within which was the *konak* or government headquarters of the province. In part the walls were in good repair and on the south side still stood some 40-foot towers and square bastions reaching 10 feet higher. Four large gates pierced the city walls: the Kharpūt (Kharput) or Mountain Gate on the north, the Hrom or Urfa Gate on the west, the Mardin Gate on the south, and the New Gate (Yeni Kapi) on the east.

The flat-roofed houses and shops of the city tended to be low and built of stone or of stone and adobe. Water was supplied to the city by a number of springs within the walls, but these were supplemented by aqueducts carrying water from the mountains. The streets, 10 to 15 feet wide, were badly paved and dirty, but the bazaar was well stocked with goods brought from every direction via the trade routes that still crossed the plains of northern Mesopotamia. A fine stone bridge of many arches, dating from the Roman period but restored under the Arabs, spanned the Tigris River about 2 miles south of Diarbekir. By the end of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 202 and map 190. For the Armenian villages of Diarbekir, see the vilayet map in Kévorkian and Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens de l'empire Ottoman*, p. 392.

relatively good roads connected the city with Aleppo, the Mediterranean port of Alexandretta (now Iskenderun), and the Black Sea port of Samsun (via Kharpert, Malatia, and Sivas).<sup>89</sup> Other secondary routes linked Diarbekir to Mosul and to Bitlis and Van. A feature probably responsible for the location of the city in the first place was that only at Diarbekir did the Tigris River become navigable. From early times the river here was known for its rafts called *keleks*, supported by inflated skins that carried traffic downstream from Diarbekir.<sup>90</sup>

One of the most striking features of the Armenians of Diarbekir was their unique dialect. While most Western Armenian dialects were heavily influenced by Turkish, that of Diarbekir spoken so far to the south was more influenced by Kurdish and Arabic, so much so that the dialect was incomprehensible to most other Armenians. The dialect was preserved for a long time in the United States, as Dikranagerdtsi immigrants tended to settle in their own neighborhoods.<sup>91</sup>

Mardin, the center of the district and county of that name, was the ancient fortress of Marde (Armenian: Mardeberd), whose castle still dominates the city from its high peak above. By the end of the nineteenth century, Mardin had a population of approximately 25,000 inhabitants, of whom 15,700 were Muslim and 8,710 Christian. Of the Muslims, 10,000 were said to be "Muslims properly called" (presumably Turks), 4,000 Kurds, and 1,700 Syrian Arabs. Among the native Christians, 4,330 were Armenian Apostolics, 1,200 Armenian Catholics, and 1,700 Armenian Protestants. The Syrian Jacobites with 810 adherents, the Chaldean Catholics with 580, and the Syrian Catholics with 90 made up the rest. There were, in addition, 580 Jews and 10 European missionaries (6 French Franciscans and 4 Italian Capuchins). Around the city lay 105 villages of mixed Christian and Muslim peasantry tilling some of the most fertile soil in northern Mesopotamia. There were also about 1,400 Circassian settlers from the North Caucasus, who had

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<sup>89</sup> Mc Donagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, pp. 534, 538-39.

<sup>90</sup> *Collier's Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York, 1956), p. 506.

<sup>91</sup> For the dialect of Diarbekir, see Hrachia Adjarian, *Classification des dialects arméniennes* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1909), pp. 54-55.

migrated to the Ottoman Empire after the conquest of their homeland by the Russians in the mid-nineteenth century. Mardin, still surrounded by walls, had some 20 mosques, 3 Muslim theological schools known as medresses, and 3 Christian monasteries belonging, respectively, to the Syrian Catholics, the Franciscans, and the Capuchins. The city also possessed 10 churches: 2 Armenian Catholic, 2 Syrian Catholic, 1 Chaldean Catholic, 1 Latin-rite belonging to the Italian Capuchins, 3 Syrian Orthodox, and 1 affiliated with the local American mission station. Mardin was a major center of Armenian Catholicism, and there are still a few Armenian Catholics residing there to this day.<sup>92</sup>

Palu lay on the right (north) bank of the Aratsani River, that is, the southern arm of the Euphrates River at the foot of a peak upon which stands the remains of an Urartian fortress. The name of the town is extremely old and recalls the ancient Pala or Bala people of Assyrian and Hittite records who were one of the many components that went into the make-up of the Armenian people and is also reminiscent of the historic Armenian districts of Balahovit, Palunik, and Pagnatun. The kaza of Palu was a heavily populated Armenian district with some 40 Armenian-inhabited villages.<sup>93</sup>

Arghana, located on a route from the Black Sea to Mosul, was the center of a sanjak and kaza of that name. Cuinet in the late nineteenth century gave its population as 6,150, including 2,625 Muslims (1,000 of them Kurds), 2,525 Armenians (including 525 Protestants), and 1,000 Greeks. Arghana should not to be confused with Arghana-Maden on the Tigris, a small copper mining town where there was a bridge across the river.<sup>94</sup>

The kaza of Chermik or Chermuk contained two significant localities, Chermik and Chunkush, which stood on the edge of a cliff amid spectacular scenery. Chunkush was the seat of an Armenian Apostolic bishop whose residence was at the nearby

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<sup>92</sup> For Mardin about 1890, see Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 499-502; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, pp. 201-19; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 6, pp. 539-42.

<sup>93</sup> Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, p. 134; Kévorkian and Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens de l'empire Ottoman*, pp. 392, 408.

<sup>94</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 479-80.

Monastery of Sirahayiats Surb Astvatsatsin.<sup>95</sup> The large village of Chermik, population 4,680, was the site of a hot spring and was known in ancient times as Abarne or Vagharshakupolis. The Turkish form Chermik (now Cermik) is based on the Armenian word *jerm* or *cherm*, meaning warm, a reference to the warm springs there known since antiquity.<sup>96</sup>

Severek, located about 50 miles or 85 kilometers west of Diarbekir on the way to Urfa, had a sizable Armenian community and was also the center of a cluster of eight entirely Armenian villages: Mesebin, Hayebi, Hadro, Mazra, Pekcheri, Hosdhin, Khallokan, and Simakli. Severek may be considered the southwestern limit of the ancestral Armenian homeland.<sup>97</sup> Cuinet estimated its population to be 10,000, of whom about 5,250 were said to be Muslims (including about 1,000 Kurds), 3,500 Armenian Apostolics, 150 Armenian Protestants, 100 Armenian Catholics, and about 1,000 Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites). Located on the caravan route to Aleppo, Severek was a prosperous town surrounded by vineyards. By Cuinet's time, a good road had replaced the tortuous caravan trails that had previously hindered trade.<sup>98</sup>

Savur, a small and little-known town lying just north of Mardin, was the district capital of the kaza of Avine but had once been the center of an Armenian enclave that maintained a semi-autonomous existence until the nineteenth century.<sup>99</sup> In Cuinet's time at the end of the nineteenth century, the total population of the town was 3,874, of whom 2,272 were Muslims, 1,000 Armenian Catholics, 500 Armenian Apostolics, and 102 Syrian Orthodox.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Karnik Kevorkian [Garnik Gevorgian], *Chnkushapatum* [The Story of Chunkush], vol. 1 (Drexel Hill, PA: Groong, 1970). Volume 2 is being prepared from the late author's manuscript, and an English translation is reportedly in progress.

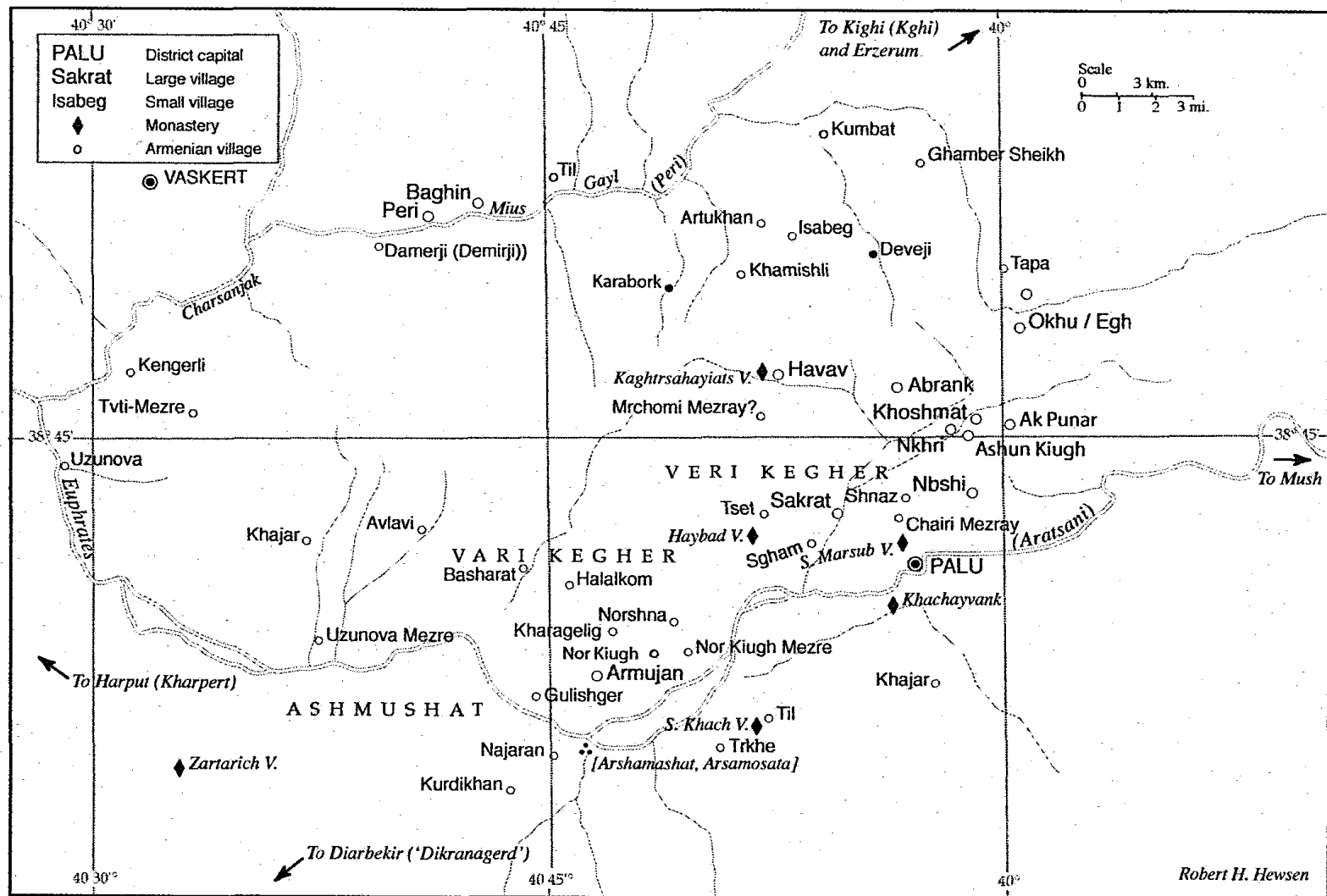
<sup>96</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XVIII.9.2; Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharhatsoyts"-i*, p. 31. For Ottoman Chermuk, see Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 492-93 (who calls the village Tchernik).

<sup>97</sup> Hewsen, *Atlas*, p. 202.

<sup>98</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 466-67.

<sup>99</sup> Arshak Alpoyajian, *Patmakan Hayastani sahmannere* [The Boundaries of Historical Armenia] (Cairo: Nor Astgh, 1950), p. 436.

<sup>100</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, pp. 518-19.



Nisibis (now Nisibin), a once proud city, had long lost its importance by the Ottoman period and had dwindled to a town of barely 10,000 people. Of these, some 5,000 were Muslims, and 3,000 Armenians (including 2,000 Apostolics, 500 Catholics, and 500 Protestants). About 1,000 Greek Orthodox and about an equal number of Chaldean Catholics gave the town an unusually significant Christian population.<sup>101</sup>

At present, Diyarbakir (contemporary official spelling) with a burgeoning population of more than a million inhabitants is, as it was in Ottoman times, the largest city in southeastern Turkey. It is the capital of the province (now called *il*) of Diyarbakir (15,355 square kilometers or 5,929 square miles), made up of most of the former sanjak of that name, and has a population of more than two million inhabitants.<sup>102</sup> The city of Diyarbakir, an industrial center of sorts, has expanded to the west beyond the walls. Its chief products include woolen and cotton textiles as well as copper work, woven covers and mats known as *kilims*, carpets, and the more traditional gold and silver filigree work for which it was noted in the past. It is connected to Ankara and Istanbul by air and to other parts of the country by train and bus. Good roads link it with Aleppo in Syria and with Mosul in Iraq as well as to other cities in Turkey.<sup>103</sup> Unlike other Anatolian cities such as Sivas or Erzerum, much of modern Diyarbakir has maintained a traditional Middle Eastern character with narrow, winding streets and women still wearing veils and chadors. The population is now predominantly Kurdish, and there have been sporadic and sometimes sustained rebellions against Turkish rule in the region.<sup>104</sup> A branch of Ankara University was opened there in 1966 and became an independent institution as Tigris University in 1973.<sup>105</sup> A city of military importance since ancient times,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 509-11.

<sup>102</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 9 (Danbury, CT: Scholastic Press, 1990), p. 217.

<sup>103</sup> Mc Donagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, p. 531.

<sup>104</sup> In 1999, the author passed a convoy of over one hundred truckloads of Turkish soldiers being sent south along the Bitlis-Diarbekir road to deal with a Kurdish insurgency in the Diarbekir area.

<sup>105</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17th ed., *Micropaedia*, vol. 4, p. 137.

Diyarbakir during the Cold War was dominated by the Turkish military establishment, supplemented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>106</sup> A few Armenians remain in the city but the roof of their once handsome church has collapsed, and services are now held in a poor and tawdry chapel. A Syrian Orthodox church and a Chaldean Catholic church remain intact and are still in use for worship.<sup>107</sup>

### *Urfa*

The city of Urfa (Armenian: Etesiya; Urha) lay on the banks of the Karachai or Black River (Greek Skirtos; now Balih), a waterway notorious for its frequent flooding.<sup>108</sup> According to Cuinet in the late nineteenth century, the population of the city numbered 55,000, of whom 40,835 were Muslims and the remainder Christians of various denominations, but figures for the sanjak seem particularly unreliable.<sup>109</sup> Ormanian estimates 25,800 Armenians (including 1,000 Catholics and 800 Protestants) with 16 parishes, 10 churches, and 24,000 adherents in the sanjak of Urfa and the vilayet of Zor, which together formed the diocese of Etesiya.<sup>110</sup> Urfa possessed a thriving textile industry, especially in locally grown cotton. Improvements in the roadways made by 1890 had led to a revival of trade. The city was flourishing at the end of the century, as a result of which suburbs had grown up outside the walls.

Following World War I and the Armenian Genocide, British and then French troops briefly occupied the city in 1919, but after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, ending hostilities between the Allied Powers and Turkey, Urfa was included in the new Turkey rather than being granted to Syria, which would have

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<sup>106</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 9, p. 217.

<sup>107</sup> McDonagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, p. 537. For more details on modern Diarbekir, see pp. 531-38. Of particular interest to the visitor are the pools of sacred carp, which were founded in the pagan period and which were assimilated into both the Christian and, later, the Muslim faiths (*Fodor's Turkey*, p. 223).

<sup>108</sup> There were major floods at Edessa in A.D. 201, 303, 413, and especially 515 when 30,000 people perished (Mc Donagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, p. 515).

<sup>109</sup> Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, p. 261.

<sup>110</sup> Ormanian, *Armenian Church*, p. 206.

been more justified historically.<sup>111</sup> Known since 1973 as Sanliurfa (Glorious Urfa) for its role in the struggle against the French occupation, the city now has a population of more than a million inhabitants and is the capital of its own il, which encompasses the former sanjak of Urfa.<sup>112</sup> Sanliurfa has an airport with regular flights to Ankara, a bus station, a tourist information office, and a few suitable hotels. Its sights include the museum, citadel, colorful open-air bazaar, and the twelfth-century Ulu Jami or Great Mosque.<sup>113</sup>

However distant the regions of Diarbekir and Urfa may seem to have been from the center of Armenian concerns, there is no question that the northern sector of the vilayet of Diarbekir lay on the Armenian Plateau, that, touching as they did upon the confines of Syria, the two cities served as gateways to Armenia and as important contact zones, and that both of them have loomed large in Armenian minds since ancient times.

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<sup>111</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 8, pp. 592-93. The post-World War I boundary between Turkey and Syria was drawn to follow the line of the existing Berlin to Baghdad Railway and remains unaltered to this day. Thus, cities such as Diarbekir, Urfa, Antioch (Antakia), Seruch, and Nisibin were left in Turkish hands despite the small number of Turks in those cities and the surrounding countryside.

<sup>112</sup> *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 27, p. 630.

<sup>113</sup> For modern Urfa, see Mc Donagh, *Blue Guide: Turkey*, pp. 515-20.